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Contrasting the classical explanation of military group cohesion as sustained by interpersonal bonds, recent scholars have highlighted the importance of ritualised communication, training and drills in explaining effective military performance in professional armies. While this has offered a welcome addition to the cohesion literature and a novel micro-sociological method of examining cohesion, its primary evidential base has been combat groups. Indeed, despite their prominent role in directing operations over the past decade, the British Army's officer corps has received relatively little attention from sociologists during this period. No attempt has been made to explain cohesion in the officer corps. Using a similar method to recent cohesion scholars, this paper seeks to address this imbalance by undertaking a micro-sociology of one ritual in particular: 'Barossa Night' in the Royal Irish Regiment. Firstly, it draws on the work of Durkheim to examine how cohesion amongst the officer corps is created and sustained through a dense array of practises during formal social rituals. It provides evidence that the use of rituals highlights that social solidarity is central to understanding officer cohesion. Secondly, following Hockey's work on how private soldiers negotiate order, the paper shows how this solidarity in the officer corps is based on a degree of negotiated order and the need to release organizational tensions inherent in a strictly hierarchical rank structure. It highlights how the awarding of gallantry medals can threaten this negotiated order and fuel deviancy. In examining this behaviour, the paper shows that even amongst an officer class traditionally viewed as the elite upholders of organizational discipline, the negotiation of rank and hierarchy can be fluid. How deviant behaviour is later accepted and normalized by senior officers indicates that negotiated order is as important to understanding cohesion in the British Army's officer corps as it is amongst private soldiers.

Keywords: cohesion, negotiated order, officers, ritual, gallantry medals.

'A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of coloured ribbon' (Napoleon Bonaparte, cited in 'A Bit of Coloured Ribbon', *The Economist* 6 July 2012)²

In March 2009, five months after a combat tour of Afghanistan, the officers of 'one of the toughest and most professional units in the British army' ('Have You Ever Used a Pistol?', *The Sunday Times*, 2 July 2006)³ gathered to celebrate their first formal social event since their return. During the evening, regimental totems were displayed, a humorous speech was made, a regimental song was sung, and a special cocktail of alcohol was passed around for all to imbibe whilst shouting 'Barossa!' at the top of their lungs. But as the night wore on, tensions began to emerge. Some of the younger captains hurled abuse, some crawled under the dinner table to harass senior officers, others crept outside to relieve themselves. There was a small, but potentially significant, breakdown of discipline. That this occurred amongst the highly professional and cohesive officers of an infantry battalion in

one of Britain's elite brigades raises interesting questions. Why are such seemingly ancient rituals followed in modern units? And why did the social order break down? Indeed, although the officer corps provides the connecting point between military sub-groups and organizational goals, relatively little attention has been paid to how it generates and maintains its cohesion. Perhaps the events of this strange evening can prove instructive about cohesion amongst British army officers.

In seeking to better understand the internal dynamics of the professional British officer corps, this paper undertakes a micro-sociology of one ritual in particular: 'Barossa Night' in the 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment. It addresses two areas. Firstly, expanding on the recent literature on the importance of drills and training in generating effective performance in professional militaries, it shows how formal social rituals are used to create social solidarity amongst British army officers. Secondly, using one Barossa Night as evidence, it highlights that despite a strictly hierarchical rank structure, officer cohesion is in part based on a negotiation of social order. The conclusion argues that officers' use of social rituals and their negotiation of order indicate that social solidarity remains important to understanding their cohesion, and indeed that of wider professional militaries.

British officer sociology and cohesion

Interestingly, given their role in directing operations over the past decade, the British army's officer corps has received relatively little attention from sociologists during this period. In 2004, Keith MacDonald built on previous sociologies (Otley 1973; MacDonald 1980; Von Zugbach 1988) and Bourdieu's views of the 'habitus' and 'field' to demonstrate that class elitism remained a key cultural characteristic of the officer corps (MacDonald 2004). This view was partially challenged in 2009 by King, who focused on the Joint Services and Command College to argue that, while some elements of elitism remain, the modern British officer corps is being transformed by the process of the professionalization. In an article in this Journal, King argued that officers were unifying around collective military practices taught at the college, but nevertheless concluded that many tensions remain in the corps (King 2009: 141). King's later examination of the European staff officer network

highlighted how they too were uniting through professionalism (King 2011: 65–102). More specifically, the ethos of ‘officership’ and officer education in the British army has also been examined (Mileham 1995; Mileham 2012), while Cathy Downes has highlighted socialisation during initial training at Sandhurst (Downes 1991). Charles Kirke has elucidated on the cultural elements of cohesion, but did not focus on rituals (Kirke 2009), and has also developed a model for describing the social structures of British army soldiers, including officers (Kirke 2002). Power and hierarchy in a British infantry platoon have also been studied (Killworth 1997). Overall, however, the sociological literature on the British army’s officer corps has been dominated by the elitist research. There has been no sustained examination of its internal dynamics nor how it generates and sustains its cohesion.

To understand the events of Barossa Night one must first turn to the literature on military group cohesion. Most scholars agree that cohesion is vital to explaining effective military performance (King 2013; MacCoun and Hix 2010; Griffith 2007; Siebold 2011). However, in 2006, the traditional understanding of military cohesion as primarily formed and maintained by interpersonal bonds between soldiers (Shils and Janowitz 1948; Stoufer et al. 1949; Henderson 1985; Wong et al. 2003; Wong 2006; Siebold 2007) was challenged by numerous scholars who concluded in modern professional forces task commitment, training, and communication were fundamental to effective combat performance (Ben Shalom, Lehrer and Ben–Ari 2005; MacCoun et al. 2006; King 2006a; Strachan 2006). Collectively, they argued that in professional armies, drills matter more than bonds. Within this group, Anthony King’s ‘The Word of Command’ was especially noteworthy as it drew on the work of Emile Durkheim to show how ritualised communication processes and choreographed collective drill movements were central to explanations of professional unit cohesion (King 2006a: 501–3). By focusing on the micro–interactions at the platoon level, King’s methodology was also novel in that it primarily relied on field observations rather than the interviews and surveys favoured by classical cohesion scholars.

In *The Combat Soldier*, King (2013) dissected the impact of professionalism on cohesion in much greater detail. In a particularly illustrative chapter, he utilized micro–sociology to highlight how

success in modern close quarter battle is fundamentally reliant on intensely choreographed and minor but often decisive collective movements (King 2013: 237). Following Weber, King argued that such battle drills and training were only possible once armies had professionalised into specialized units with monopolies of knowledge. New members are only accepted into the professional unit when they have met standards set by the status group they seek to join. Crucially, King detailed how ‘status honour’ is central to life in professional combat units and ultimately generates social solidarity (King 2013: 215). King’s astute ethnographic, micro–sociological observations linked professionalism, formalised collective action, and cohesion. His approach placed emphasis on interactions rather than interpersonal bonds, and therefore supported the recent cohesion literature. But King’s and others’ focus on the combat platoon has not examined how formal social rituals generate cohesion in professional forces, nor the officer corps in particular. Indeed, the use of the formal social ritual in generating military cohesion has been overlooked to date entirely. I seek to address this imbalance. In this paper I want to apply the micro–sociology of King and the other recent cohesion scholars, to a profoundly social environment of professional British officers. In doing so, I argue that for all the recent emphasis on training and drills in modern armies, social solidarity remains important to understanding cohesion amongst British army officers. Indeed, such is its importance it is actively worked at and negotiated.

Case selection and methodology

1 Royal Irish was chosen for this study because, as a former officer in the battalion, the author has over four years’ experience of complete participant observation (Spradley 1980), during which numerous Barossa Nights were attended. 1 Royal Irish is worthy of study for other reasons: it was recently rated as one of the most effective regular infantry battalions in the British Army (personal communication, former Chief of the General Staff, 19 July 2012). It is therefore highly professionally competent. Perhaps not surprisingly, the battalion is also one of the most cohesive in the British army; it has one of the highest rates of retention in the infantry (personal communication, 1 Royal Irish officer, January 2013). Retention is one measure of unit cohesion, and combined with the unit’s

recognised professionalism, therefore marks the battalion as a particularly useful example to examine how its officers generate cohesion. 1 Royal Irish is also broadly representative of any other British army regiment in that it has its own distinctive unit traditions and celebrates these traditions in formal social rituals. Indeed, while the regimental system is widely considered to be more conducive to the development and maintenance of solidarity than centralised systems (Newsome 2003: 37), the social events are similar to those held in units in other Western militaries. While the participant observation approach can prove problematic both in terms of the selection of data and impartiality, to ensure accuracy data has been complimented by personal communication with former officers who attended the Barossa Night in question and some of whom were present at the incidents identified in Afghanistan. Personal communication and interviews were also conducted between 2013 and 2015 and used to corroborate evidence. A draft of this paper was then circulated for participant comment. Consent was obtained for all comments and all references to all participants were fully anonymised. In order to best triangulate data, evidence has also been collected from personal memoirs, accounts of operations in Helmand, and newspaper reports.

The Barossa Night ritual

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* Durkheim posited that social life is divided between the ‘profane’ and the ‘sacred’ (Durkheim 1976: 37); between everyday interactions and those imbued with symbolic meanings for a community. For Durkheim, carefully controlled and choreographed rituals separate the community’s sacred values from the profane, with initiation ceremonies and the separation of those who can partake from those who cannot key elements of these rites. Moreover, rituals are supported by the use of sacred totems. These items represent everything the community holds dear about itself; they are imbued with a moral power derived from the tradition of the community’s sacred ancestors (Durkheim 1976: 122). Thus, in practising sacred rites, members of the community themselves become totemic; the initiated also become sacred (Durkheim 1976: 136). As a result, Durkheim argues that the logical systems of rites and totems reproduce the unity of society; they create solidarity. More recent research on social rituals has confirmed Durkheim’s

observations, both in non-military (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Goodin 1980) and military contexts (Aran 1974; Zurcher 1965; Winslow 1999). However, despite their prominence in officer's memoirs, (Caputo 1977; Hennessey 2009) there has been little attention on the impact of formal military rituals on officers' social relations.

The Barossa Night dinner is the primary recurring formal social ritual in the 1 Royal Irish Officers' Mess. The event is held annually to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Barossa on 5 March 1811, in which an antecedent regiment of the Royal Irish, the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers, became the first British unit to capture a Napoleonic standard. The standard, a gold eagle awarded by Napoleon to the French unit for its bravery, was seized as the unit made a final stand around its own totem (representative of his dictum above), before being overrun by the 87th, who became national heroes once news of their seizure of the prized totem spread. Barossa Night has celebrated the feat of the 87th ever since. It is traditionally exclusively reserved for officers serving at regimental duty. In Durkheimian terms, the 'uninitiated' wives of serving officers, and non-regimental officers, are excluded from this sacred rite. This sacrosanct nature and formality of the event separate it from semi-formal and informal social gatherings, and make it particularly relevant for study. Indeed, the Barossa Night ritual's structure and formality indicates it is so revered by the officers.

The Officers' Mess is the location for Barossa Night because it represents the centre of the regimental clan, it is here that the sacred emblem of the unit, the regimental colours, are kept and 'dressed' in a 'manner strictly determined by tradition' (Durkheim 1976: 125). 'The colours' are inscribed with over 150 battle honours – including Barossa – and therefore imbued with a moral power that far outweighs their physical value. This most sacred regimental totem is placed near the dining table on Barossa Night to remind the officers of both the exalted status of combat and of their regimental ancestors. Similarly, the public rooms of the Mess are adorned with pictures of past battles, reminding all present that they have entered a hallowed space. Attendance is compulsory for all officers serving 'at' battalion duty and all of the 30 or so officers invited wear the red dress uniform of British army infantry regiments. This uniform is worn during formal social events; it denotes

formal social settings and separates proceedings from the profane of normal military life when the camouflage uniform is worn. It also invokes the past feats of the 'Thin Red Line' of the nineteenth century infantry. Officers also wear their medals on their uniform in a symbolic display of the experience and combat prowess of the bearer, and a senior officer is typically tasked with ensuring that everything is in order for event. This emphasizes the formal nature of the event and ties it to the norms associated with military duty.

The single, long dinner table is arranged so that all the battalion's officers can sit at it, and the seating plan is structured by rank; the highest ranks sit at the centre with lower ranks at the edges. While such a plan is intended to keep peer groups relatively separated, it also implicitly emphasizes the power of the senior officers and socially separates them from junior officers. This is important to maintaining discipline. The table itself is adorned with regimental silver. This goes beyond mere cutlery. Large silver totemic statuettes and dioramas dominate the table and portray the combat action of the regimental ancestors; they are also imbued with moral power. Indeed, the high monetary and moral value of these pieces ensure that most are stored securely and only used when the officers unite. Like the colours, the regimental silver reminds those dining of the sanctity placed on combat by the unit and the ability of their ancestors to master it. In fact, it is arguable that combat itself is viewed as sacred by infantry units. As it provides the organizational goal around which the group orients and by which each member is ultimately judged, combat acquires a quasi-mythical status. There is much evidence that British combat units are especially aware of their collective histories, and that past combat actions are sacred for these communities (King 2004; 2006b). Unit histories are also specifically taught to new members to inculcate them in the heroic actions of their ancestors. But this moral power of old tradition is fused with modern professionalism. The proven ability to master combat bestows status honour on officers and unites them in the inner circle of combat-tested veterans. The sanctity of combat is therefore simultaneously mythical and profoundly practical.

In entering the Mess in their distinctive dress uniforms, in seeing the regimental colours and silver arranged, and in being organized by ritually-determined seating plans, the solidarity of the

officers is already re-affirmed at the start of the ritual. Once the officers are seated dinner service begins. From this time, until the end of proceedings, nobody is allowed to leave the table for any reason. While the reason for such a rule, other than respect, is unclear, its effect is not; just like the Aborigines' religious rituals, 'the faithful remain seated... in an attitude of the purest devotion' (Durkheim 1976: 126). Leaving the group during its reaffirmation ceremony, even to urinate, is seen as unacceptable and ultimately deviant behaviour. As such, the rule also adds an element of a test to the ritual; officers must be able to drink but not urinate. Similarly, battalion members are not allowed to take photographs of the event; this would taint the sanctity of the ritual. It would also mean there was a record of officers' drunken carousing. The Barossa ceremony itself begins after a dinner accompanied by copious wine. Previously, one of the most junior officers will have been chosen by the Commanding Officer (CO) to deliver the Barossa speech. The aim of the speech is to recount the key narrative of the Battle of Barossa in a contemporary and humorous vein. In particular, the speaker is expected to collect amusing anecdotes on every officer sitting at the table based on their shared experiences over the past year. The CO's choice generally reflects the need for the Barossa speechmaker to have some knowledge of his colleagues but to still be inexperienced, as the Barossa speech is seen as an initiation ceremony into the battalion for young officers. While the speech would be deemed a mild initiation, for the chosen young officer it is a trial by peers. In the lead up he will be constantly goaded about the need to deliver a good speech by other officers. This enforcement of a good standard for the speech highlights how Barossa Night transcends the purely social nature of the ritual; a poorly delivered speech, either due to lack of humour or intoxication, is viewed as a professional as well as a social blunder. There is thus a duty to perform for the Barossa speech maker that is felt intensely by all who partake in the ritual.

By recounting a famous victory in a contemporary vein, the Barossa speech reaffirms the group both socially and professionally. On the one hand, the speech reminds those present of the 'fabulous times of their great ancestors' (Durkheim 1977: 125). It reaffirms the high value placed upon successful and glorious combat action and the sacrifice that goes with it. On the other hand, in

reciting individuals' embarrassing anecdotes, the Barossa speech strengthens the contemporary officers' solidarity. This is because most of the anecdotes – that must be told about every officer at the table – directly relate to their professional conduct over the past year. The Barossa speech therefore reinforces the norms expected of professional behaviour by humouring individual misdemeanours in front of the group. Following Victor Turner (1969), the fact that this includes the CO and other senior officers indicates the anti-structural characteristics of the Barossa speech ritual; the speech temporarily flattens the hierarchical rank structure and simultaneously creates a sense of *communitas*. The use of humour during the formal speech is also significant. Humour can be a 'conflict weapon' that is 'expressed largely by means of irony, satire, sarcasm, caricature...' (Stephenson 1951: 569). Humour allows people to 'get back' at those with authority over them in ways that would not be possible with overt behaviour. It also provides a means of 'letting off steam' (Hockey 1986: 113), of reducing organizational tensions inherent in a hierarchical rank structure. Indeed, this appears to be one of the latent aims of the Barossa speech.

After dinner, a piper from the battalion band enters and begins to play traditional Irish music. Soon after, the piper strikes up the 'Barossa Air'; a song that all present are expected to sing along to. The Barossa Air is only played during Barossa Night, it is thus sacred itself, as are the lyrics which the officers sing as they strike the table with their hands, creating a constant group rhythm. At the same time, a large silver bowl – known as the 'Barossa bowl' and filled with Irish spirits following a closely-guarded traditional recipe – is passed around the table with reverence. As the bowl is passed from officer to officer, the recipient takes a long swig and shouts 'Barossa!' at the top of his lungs. This rhythmic procession continues until the bowl is emptied; here William McNeill's observations on 'muscular bonding' are revealing. For McNeill, the simple act of marching in unison generates unique emotional cadence, 'a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in a collective ritual'. McNeill argues that 'moving big muscles together and chanting, singing, or shouting rhythmically' causes emotions that form the basis of social solidarity in groups that keep in time together (McNeill 1997: 2). The exalted status of the

Barossa cocktail also supports Durkheim's observations on the ritualistic use of alcohol to heighten the intensity of the sacred experience. Similarly, others have outlined how the 'internal functions of group cohesion and solidarity [are] performed in drinking rituals' where the 'subtle residues of ritual conventions are embedded in the utensils and paraphernalia'; in this case the Barossa bowl (Bancroft 2009: 62). This use of alcohol, song and rhythm is very important; not only does it raise the emotional level of those taking part, it re-affirms the distinctive character of the group whilst at the same time serving as the strongest and final re-affirmation act of the ceremony before the officers disperse.

Negotiated order at Barossa Night, 2009

The Weberian rational-bureaucratic theory of complex organisations based on rules and professional norms is perhaps most commonly associated with military organisations, and the officer corps in particular, due to their strict codes of discipline, hierarchical rank structure and high professional standards (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1971; Cohen 1985). This is also the predominant popular perception of the officer corps, influenced by recruitment campaigns that stress the loyalty, duty and leadership characteristics required of officers. This perception of social order in the military as rigidly static is perhaps why it has been little studied by negotiated order scholars to date. One notable exception is John Hockey's *Squaddies* (1986), which draws on previous works (Strauss et al. 1963; Crozier 1971, 1973) to examine how British army soldiers interpret and subvert the military discipline and ranks systems to their own advantage in their everyday lives. Hockey details how private soldiers develop unofficial practises to avoid certain undesirable aspects of military life: by 'skiving' off duties or 'scrounging' kit they are able to make life easier for themselves (Hockey 1986: 50–3). While Hockey shows how normative codes continue to limit the type and extent of deviance, he also examines how those further up the chain of command, including officers, often overlook deviant practises that do not directly challenge the social order of the unit (Hockey 1986: 67, 129). Crucially, Hockey posits that due to the organisational requirement for social cohesion in military units, deviancy is not necessarily always at odds with organisational goals (Hockey 1986: 1, 146–7). In dealing with deviant acts, such as brawling with civilians or wearing non-issue uniform, Hockey

shows that a relaxed interpretation of military law is often favoured by superiors as a trade-off for effective performance, as they indicate group solidarity and professional prowess (Hockey 1986: 159). Thus, because individual effort and good working relationships support military organisational goals, Hockey shows that the simple private – the sociological ‘underdog’ (Day and Day 1977: 131) – has at times potentially significant power to negotiate social order in military units. However, Hockey also highlights that where deviant acts are deemed too contra organisational behavioural norms and goals, rule-breaking is often followed by a reassertion of formality; in essence social order temporarily becomes less negotiable (Hockey 1986: 67–75). Thus, Hockey’s main argument is that the interpretation of discipline for private soldiers ‘is very much a process in and through which the reality of the organization [and hence solidarity] is created and sustained’ (Hockey 1986: 142). Hockey’s work is important because it emphasises how, even in one of the most traditionally strict and prevalent organizational discipline systems, deviancy and the negotiation and interpretation of rules are crucial to maintaining social order. While Kirke, amongst others, has critiqued Hockey’s approach and put forward his own version of Goffman’s secondary adjustment theory as a better way of understanding deviant behaviour, it is interesting to note that this theory is itself fundamentally based on negotiated order (Kirke 2010: 367–74). Hockey’s approach will thus be followed here. Yet his exclusive focus on how private soldiers’ negotiate order leaves open the question of if and how British army officers can negotiate their social order?

Despite deviance being often viewed as a threat to the group, according to Georg Simmel ‘a certain amount of discord, inner divergence and outer controversy, is organically tied up with the very elements that ultimately hold the group together’ (Simmel 1955: 18). Deviancy can show how a society copes with conflict. One of the most interesting deviant episodes occurred at the 2009 Barossa Night ritual after the battalion had recently returned from Afghanistan. The details of this tour and its impact on the officers’ social relations are discussed in detail below. Here it is simply useful to note that many of the younger captains had been exposed to sustained combat and that shared combat experiences can flatten rank hierarchies (Hockey 1986: 100; Little 1964). Moreover, this Barossa

Night also represented the first time the battalion's officers were formally united since Afghanistan, and the event came a day before the Operational Honours and Awards list was announced.⁴ As such, this Barossa Night represented the re-affirmation of the rank hierarchy and strict codes of behaviour that had been relatively flattened during deployment. It also brought to the fore the issue of recognition of the officers' efforts during the tour.

Another more specific factor in explaining the junior officers' behaviour that night was that these officers believed the CO had transgressed a norm of the Barossa ritual. While Barossa Night is traditionally reserved exclusively for Royal Irish officers, on this occasion the CO decided to invite his superior, the new brigade commander, to the event. This was seen by most of the other officers, and especially those younger commanders who had just returned from combat, as not only a break with regimental tradition – an affront to the sanctity of the event – but also as limiting their ability to relax during the much-anticipated ritual. The presence of the brigade commander, who writes appraisal reports for majors and above, increased the professional dimension of the event beyond what was deemed reasonable, and meant that some officers felt they were 'on parade' more than if the ritual had been confined to regimental officers. The CO's extension of an invitation to the newly appointed brigade commander had another motive. Bury and King (2015) have noted the importance of political motivations in explanations of cohesion with reference to 1 Royal Irish, and the presence of the commander was an attempt to impress him to cement the battalion's continued inclusion in the elite 16 Air Assault Brigade, thereby safeguarding it from future defence cuts. However, it also disrupted the negotiated order amongst the battalion's officers; it not only eroded the exclusive status of Barossa Night, it also meant that officers felt they were less likely to enjoy what was 'their' event. Indeed, in the words of one officer: [that] Barossa wasn't a Barossa Night: it was a PR exercise for 1 Royal Irish' (personal communication with former 1 Royal Irish officer, 7 July 2015). Other former officers agree with this interpretation (personal communication, 15 August 2015). As such the invitation also represented the CO's power over his officers, and in doing so in such an overt and arguably unreasonable manner, it contributed to the subsequent breakdown of the negotiated order.

After the Barossa bowl rite, the CO stood and announced that in the following morning's Operational Honours and Awards List the battalion would do very well, including some officers seated around the table. The initial announcement was met with much applause, and the conversation that followed quickly turned to the actions the officers in question had won their awards for. Indeed, given the rich operational knowledge of each other's performance in Afghanistan, some officers expressed their surprise at some of the awards made to their colleagues. Some of this surprise may not have been unfounded. It is worthy of note that one of the awards made to an artillery officer attached to 1 Royal Irish during the tour was subsequently found to be based on flawed testimony; the officer was stripped of the medal, and the Royal Irish's handling of this citation reportedly described as 'dysfunctional' by the military authorities ('Shamed Army Major Stripped of Gallantry Award after Exaggerating Own Bravery' *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 October 2014). Another recipient was viewed by some to have been stationed in one of the most benign areas of the tour, while another officer received an honour when it was rumoured that he had fabricated patrol reports to keep higher command happy. It is important to note, however, that where awards were deemed worthy, they were fully supported by the younger captains.

As the younger captains at one end of the table discussed the merits of each award with increasing vigour, it became apparent that some of the peer group were aware that they had been written up for citations but had not received an award. This increased the sense of grievance; some of the younger officers expressed their disbelief that some of their colleagues had received an award when they knew that others, whom they deemed more worthy, had been ignored. The peer group began to cite battalion politics and a lack of knowledge of the operational realities as the cause of the allegedly misplaced awards; one of the recipients was (not entirely accurately) portrayed as a careerist and favourite of the battalion hierarchy. Despite the norm that gallantry medals should not be discussed, this sense of grievance ensured that debate continued in a more intoxicated and hence less respectful manner. The battalion chain of command was seen to be responsible for this perceived injustice. The younger captains became more irate, and that ire was directed at the rank hierarchy

which was now socially re-asserting itself for the first time since Afghanistan, and which – they felt – had in some cases misplaced recognition of their efforts there.

For example, it was widely accepted amongst this peer group that the officer in charge at Witch's Hat (discussed below) had been faced with an incident far more serious than others for which medals were awarded, while another officer had been involved in rescuing a dying soldier under fire. Indeed, it was this peer group's perception that the system of rewarding courageous acts with appropriate recognition had broken down; that the awarding of gallantry medals had been sullied by the reality of battalion politics. Thus, as these younger captains began to act in a deviant manner, they were acting against both the re-affirmation of the chain of command at the formal social ritual, and they were also expressing their displeasure at the awards system. They were withdrawing their consent from the battalion's negotiated order in a small but highly symbolic way. And in doing so at the battalion's most revered social occasion, at precisely the time when the unit was meant to reaffirm its solidarity, the younger officers displayed how alienated they felt from the chain of command. Indeed, these officers exercised what little power they had by displaying their anger toward the battalion's hierarchy in the most overt and disrespectful manner they could.

The subsequent deviancy was concentrated, predictably, at one end of the table, where the CO's authority was most dissipated. The younger captains at this end had used their influence and knowledge of the seating plan to ensure they were seated together so that they remained in close proximity to those they were socially and professionally akin to. Moreover, they ensured that the Barossa speechmaker was also seated with them so they could monitor his alcohol consumption and direct him to drink more. This inevitably happened and the young second lieutenant, subjected to peer pressure to keep drinking before the speech (which also now carried more pressure as it was to be delivered in front of the brigade commander), got increasingly intoxicated, as did the other officers at this end of the table. The consumption of alcohol occurred at a greater pace than usual, when most officers pace their alcoholic intake due to the fact they are not allowed leave the table. However, the pervasive feeling amongst the younger officers was that this was their night and they deserved a drink;

the presence of the brigade commander was seen as an infringement of unit traditions and it was therefore reasonable that if the CO broke with these traditions, they would too. As a result, when the Barossa speechmaker attempted to deliver the speech, he was too drunk to do so, slurring his words and miscuing jokes. Meanwhile, the increasingly agitated younger captains, who had goaded and forced the speechmaker to drink, now heckled him with loud cries of 'You're shit!' and other degrading remarks. Such was the ire directed at him the speechmaker fled the room after his faltering performance. This was behaviour forbidden by the norms of the ritual, which were now increasingly flouted.

As the night progressed, the intoxicated younger officers began to sneak under the table and out a nearby back door to relieve themselves. This was also forbidden, and the subsequent interaction had an element of a game to it; it had to be done covertly without either the CO or his adjutant (the officer in charge of discipline) seeing what was happening from the centre of the table. It is interesting that this idea of covert action was seized upon by the recently returned officers first; once two or three captains had crawled under the table, the junior lieutenants followed suit, thus indicating the continuing importance of rank and seniority in norm setting even for deviant acts (personal communication, former 1 Royal Irish officer, 1 February 2014). Indeed, it is not too much to suggest that the captains saw the game as representing their recent combat experiences which separated them from both the most junior, and some of the senior, officers at the table. Moreover, Little has examined how, as young officers and the platoons they command are exposed to combat, the more they identify with the defensive norms of their platoon than the wider demands and values of the higher organisation (Little 1964). The captains especially had been separated from many of their superiors in the battalion for long periods as they manned remote combat outposts and were now more hostile to the re-imposition of the hierarchical social order the Barossa ritual represented. As a result of their recent Afghan experiences, personal and organizational tensions between some of these officers and their superiors were high. Due to the former's combat experience and knowledge of battalion life, rank did not now automatically receive the respect of these officers as it once would have. The sacred

act of combat, celebrated by the unit in its totems, traditions, and in its professional ethos, had been achieved by these more junior officers; they were therefore less worried about the formal social rules that governed the ritual.

The prevalent attitude amongst the more junior officers combined with what was perceived as the CO's transgression to induce the next deviant act. One captain hatched a plan to crawl under the table to its centre and seize a spur from the boot of the brigade commander who was sitting beside the CO. Like many deviant acts, this represented 'an inherently enjoyable engrossment' (Lofland 1969: 115) which also reflected some of the excitement and challenge of combat. In directly transgressing the rules of the ritual in such an obvious manner, the captain embarrassed the CO in front of a superior whom he sought to impress, indicating the younger officers' agency and their ability to influence the social order. The captain also displayed the limits of both personal and interpersonal order within the unit. Yet the basis for this rejection of group norms is found within these norms themselves. The officers acted as they did precisely because of the greater status of the 'sacred' combat experience defined by the unit's identity. It was their combat experience that gave these officers the confidence to challenge the CO's perceived transgression; the younger captains now felt themselves proven members of the battalion and were therefore justified in acting to preserve its traditions. But in acting in such an overtly deviant manner at the most important event in the unit's social life, the officers were also expressing their frustration at the battalion's hierarchy and the rank structure in general. Pre-existing organisational tensions present in any hierarchical rank structure were accentuated by the captain's recent combat experiences, the CO's invitation to an outsider, and finally the announcement of the gallantry awards. The younger captains thus ignored both formal and informal norms and temporarily created their own social order. In acting as they did on Barossa Night, these officers were unconsciously relieving organizational tension. And in doing so, they demonstrated that the negotiated order had temporarily broken down.

However, these deviant acts also provided the means for the officers to reassert its cohesion. This was done through the discipline system. The next day those officers who were deemed to have

broken the norms of behaviour (including the speechmaker) were called in front of the adjutant and fined two bottles of port each, which were to be placed behind the Mess bar. Again, this highlights the professional element of Barossa Night; even though the deviant acts occurred in a controlled social setting away from other ranks' eyes, punishment was administered through the professional chain of command. However, the punishment was profoundly social. The port fine is a common punishment in messes that can be resorted to when an officer's social behaviour has fallen below the standards expected in the Mess; it represents a semi-formal use of the discipline system. As such, the formal chain of command was resorted to, but the punishment remained informal. This use of the discipline system to punish deviant behaviour amongst officers is highly interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it supports Hockey's arguments that resorting to the formal discipline system runs counter to military units' organisational requirement for strong solidarity and good working relationships. Crucially, the formal discipline system is resorted to only when interpersonal discipline and behavioural norms have failed to induce the expected behaviour. This resonates with King's recent argument that as armies have professionalised, their discipline has become more reliant on self-discipline than punishment (King 2015). Thus, the imposition of formal disciplinary measures represents the failure of negotiated order and consensus; its use represents a collapse of, and the attempt to re-establish, social order and solidarity. However, the social punishment of the port fine is also not only indicative of the precarious position of officers' careers if the formal discipline system is utilised, but also of the solidarity of the battalion's officers as a whole. The deviant acts of those officers recently returned from combat, although unacceptable, were seen as to a large degree understandable by the CO due the rigours of Afghanistan. In mildly sanctioning the deviant officers, the battalion's senior officers demonstrated that not only did they remain united by the same sanctified view of combat as the younger captains, but that this view – and decisively – the organisational need for social solidarity, were more important than an alcohol-fuelled collective social transgression. Indeed, in tolerating the deviancy in such a manner, the battalion's officers displayed not only how

cohesive they were, but also how much they recognised their cohesiveness was based on negotiated order.

Barossa Night 2009 in context: Afghanistan

In examining the events that occurred on the Barossa Night in question, it is important to understand the social and professional context of life in the battalion at the time, as this shows that events were not simply a ‘rite of rebellion’, but had deeper, inherently organizational origins that highlight that officers’ social order, and hence cohesion, is situationally dependent and continually negotiated and evolving. The unit had recently returned from their 2008 Operation Herrick 8 tour of Afghanistan where most of the younger captains especially had been exposed to relatively intense combat (Kiley 2009: 170–4, 210–3). Perhaps more importantly, the traditional battalion organizational structure, based on companies operating under the close supervision of battalion headquarters, had been altered due to the nature of the battalion’s specific mission; to train and mentor the 3/205 Brigade of the Afghan National Army (ANA) that was operating in Helmand province. In order to increase the ANA’s effectiveness, the Operational Mentoring Liaison and Training (OMLT) role required that infantry companies were split into small teams to mentor their Afghan colleagues. Six OMLT teams consisting of about 50 personnel were therefore created. Royal Irish soldiers within these sub-units were further divided into small teams or ‘multiples’ of 6–8 personnel attached to ANA companies (Doherty 2009: 29–30, 42). For many of the battalion’s officers this role meant they had more operational autonomy, independence, and flexibility of command than would be forthcoming in the normal battalion operational structure. For instance, the small teams were fully embedded with ANA companies and lived in very close proximity to their Afghan colleagues for the duration of their deployment. These ANA units were often based in isolated Patrol Bases (PBs) far from either their own – and the Royal Irish – chain of command. As a result, relatively junior officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) were largely responsible not only for their own teams’ operational performance, but also that of an entire ANA company. This geographic isolation from higher command also gave young officers’ increased operational autonomy in terms of base defence plans

and the design and implementation of patrolling schedules when compared with conventional battalion operations. Indeed, the degree of operational autonomy and responsibility that all ranks in the OMLT role experienced is abundantly clear when some of the gallantry medal citations subsequently awarded to battalion members during their deployment are examined (Doherty 2009: 57–8, 60–62, 97–98). Moreover, the mentality of the rank-conscious Afghans also meant that many junior officers wore ranks of one – or in some cases, two – levels up so that they would be treated with respect by ANA commanders, as the overall mentoring plan directed that British officers and NCOs were responsible for mentoring their ANA counterparts ‘one up’ (Doherty 2009: 30, 40).

One incident that occurred during the battalion’s deployment in Afghanistan is particularly worthy of study as it highlights not only the dispersed and isolated nature of the battalion’s operations, but also explains the subsequent organisational tensions so clearly displayed on Barossa Night. On 24 June 2008, with one combat platoon and an OMLT of Royal Irish soldiers engaged in heavy combat on an air assault operation in northern Helmand with 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (this relationship with 2 Para highlights the complex chain of command and dispersed nature of joint operations the Royal Irish experienced), a seven-man Royal Irish OMLT team commanded by a Captain was manning a small ANA PB in an area known as Witch’s Hat. The PB was based about one mile from the main ISAF Forward Operating Base in the area, FOB Gibraltar, itself ten miles northeast of Gereshk town. ‘Fob Gib’, as it was known, was usually manned by C Company, 2 Para, but as this company were engaged in the air assault further north (Bury 2010), support troops were manning the base defences. With Taliban insurgents actively observing incoming ISAF helicopter flights, one of these sentries fired warning bursts with a machine gun to scare them off (Kiley 2009: 166). However, this accidentally resulted in the death of a local girl and serious injury to her mother, whose angry family members now arrived at the Witch’s Hat PB. Spurred on by the inter-group dynamics in the ANA platoon (the platoon commander and sergeant had previously had a knife fight over the affections of a young Afghan soldier) and the platoon’s misplaced belief that the British had been stealing their food, the ANA platoon commander now sided with the angry crowd and mutinied.

Despite repeated attempts by the Royal Irish Captain to negotiate with the ANA, and with the insurgents seizing the opportunity to mount an attack, several of the ANA platoon now cocked and pointed their weapons at the Royal Irish soldiers (Kiley 2009: 169–171). The OMLT team responded by opening fire on the armed insurgents in the crowd and then conducting a fighting withdrawal from the Witch’s Hat to FOB Gibraltar under direct and indirect fire (Doherty 2009: 105). As they did so, FOB Gibraltar itself was also attacked by the same insurgents but the assault was repelled and the OMLT team returned safely to the base. Only one ANA soldier stayed loyal to the OMLT team, the others either walking out of the PB or simply watching the British fight (Kiley 2009: 172). The incident clearly demonstrated the dangerous consequences of a breakdown in the relationship between mentor and mentored, and the importance of inter-group dynamics in this breakdown. However, the wider risk from the incident was a political one. In 2008, the ‘green-on-blue’ insider attack campaign favoured by the Taliban in later years had not yet begun, and the deaths of a number of British soldiers at the hands of their Afghan colleagues would have represented a serious blow to already faltering British public support for the Afghan campaign. Perhaps this explains the battalion hierarchy’s response to the incident, which was not only to recall the ANA platoon to the brigade headquarters and disperse its members, but also to withdraw and re-assign the Royal Irish team who had been involved (Kiley 2009: 174). This left many of those team members feeling aggrieved at the chain of command, and some of those grievances would surface on Barossa Night.

Gallantry medals

One other rarely discussed aspect to the social life of the battalion’s officers is highly relevant to the events of Barossa Night 2009; the awarding of gallantry medals. While gallantry medals remain prominent in the public’s perceptions of military life, remarkably there appears to have been little sociological enquiry into them. Joseph Blake has examined the award patterns of the Medal of Honor, and in a later study advanced a binary theory of motivations for medal-winning acts related to the rank of recipients and organisational structure (Blake 1973; Blake and Butler 1976). More recently, Medal of Honor recipients have been portrayed as rational actors and it has been posited that an

observed decline in awards recently is related to changes in individual and social motivations (Blomberg, Hess and Radiv 2009: 141). However, there appears to be no sociological literature on the impact that the awarding of medals has on the social relations of military units, and no research on medals in the British context. This is understandable. Not only have many award recipients traditionally been reluctant to talk about their experiences, in many respects gallantry medals are the epitome of the sanctity of combat; such is the reverence of courage in combat units that their bearers are imbued with a quasi-mythical status due to their heroic actions. As a result, in the author's experience, the awarding of gallantry medals is rarely spoken about between military personnel; heroic acts are left for the chain of command to recognize and reward with the relevant citation. However, this relationship between courageous actions and relevant reward is in many respects based on negotiated order. The *quid pro quo* of committing an act over and above what is required by duty is that such acts will be rewarded by the chain of command and the wider military organization, where possible and where appropriate. Yet, as we have seen, if the relationship between courageous action and official recognition breaks down, or is perceived by some to have broken down, significant organisational tensions can arise.

There is some evidence that the awarding of gallantry medals can have a significant impact on social relations in military units. Karl Marlantes' frank discussion of heroism, medals and politics in *What It Is Like To Go To War* is particularly pertinent as he was heavily decorated for his service in Vietnam. Not only does Marlantes admit that wanting a medal partly motivated him to perform actions above and beyond normal duty, he shows how he actively bartered with a sergeant witness for a write-up before he undertook the rescue of a wounded comrade under fire (Marlantes 2011: 163–6). Marlantes forthrightly details how medals 'are all mixed up with hierarchy, politics and job descriptions', arguing convincingly that awards are related to behavioural expectations associated with rank (Marlantes 2011: 169). He also shows how medals create separate and special statuses and identities for medal recipients amongst the military community; he himself admits to being less disciplined after receiving his Navy Cross. Indeed, the jealousy and grievances that gallantry awards

can invoke amongst tightly-knit military societies are perhaps best explained by one of Marlantes' colleagues, who, having been awarded a Bronze Star for directing artillery fire, reflected in the following manner: 'A lot of people have done a lot more and gotten a lot less, and a lot of people have done a lot less and gotten a lot more' (Marlantes 2011: 163). Such a view is equally applicable to the British experience. Trevor Coult has detailed how his Military Cross caused jealousy amongst his comrades and a sense of alienation and distrust in himself (Coult 2015: 198, 218). Numerous views about the perceived validity of the awarding of the last four Victoria Crosses (Personal conversations with members of award winners' respective units) indicates that, whatever their merit, gallantry medals can be a source of organizational tension.

The sought-after status, and the politics, of gallantry awards can therefore threaten the negotiated social order in units. While these tensions generally surface in a subtle manner, it is widely known that the elite 2 Para battalion that served in Afghanistan on the same Herrick 8 deployment as 1 Royal Irish – and who bore the brunt of the heaviest fighting – were collectively very aggrieved at the paucity of medals subsequently awarded to their unit compared to the Royal Irish. Indeed, after Herrick 8, such was the anger and upset amongst battle-hardened 2 Para NCOs that a meeting was held between battalion officers and NCOs to specifically address the issue. During this meeting, the CO temporarily feared that there would be a serious breakdown in the relationship between the officers and the NCOs. This was due to the tensions over the lack of recognition for the battalion's soldiers and NCOs in the awards list (especially as officers appeared to be over-represented), with one very angry NCO walking out of the meeting remarking: 'I don't give a fuck, Sir, medals are for officers anyway' (Personal communication, 2 Para officer, 18 March 2013). The Royal Irish had been left similarly aggrieved after it sent a company of troops to reinforce 3 Para during its high-intensity combat tour of Afghanistan in 2006 on Herrick 4. After this deployment, 3 Para gained many awards, but the Royal Irish, Royal Fusilier and Royal Gurkha contingents that were equally involved in fierce fighting were comparatively ignored (Coult 2015: 199). As a result, on Herrick 8, the Royal Irish were notably more aware that courageous acts would be recognized and the chain of command had

instructed junior officers to write up their soldiers if worthy of recognition. Such a policy paid dividends, with the battalion and its attached personnel awarded an unprecedented three Conspicuous Gallantry Crosses, amongst 24 other awards. Better management of citations by 2 Para on their Herrick 13 tour in 2010–11 saw increased awards (Personal communication, 2 Para officer, 18 March 2013), thus indicating that units need to be relatively savvy to ensure they get their fair share of recognition. Indeed, with subsequent controversy surrounding one of the Royal Irish's awards and Army concerns about 'medal inflation' ('Shamed Army Major Stripped of Gallantry Award after Exaggerating Own Bravery'), it is perhaps not surprising that gallantry medals contributed to the breakdown of the negotiated order at the 2009 Barossa Night.

Cohesion in the officer corps

In his recent memoir, General Stanley McChrystal describes a cadets' mess function held at West Point in 1972 that descended into an 'historic... rally-turned-riot' McChrystal himself admits to 'hurling cups of ice cream, pulling off the tabs and lobbing them like grenades' as a military band played on, and he describes the 'glorious mess' that left the 'walls and dark oil paintings... streaked with food.' Crucially, McChrystal notes that the West Point Commandant had sent a message to the cadets explicitly stating that 'the damage to the mess hall is of secondary importance to the morale of the [officer] corps' and how the subsequent collective act of deviancy bonded those who took part (McChrystal 2013:13–4). The anecdote is noteworthy as it provides evidence from the USA of both the importance of the social ritual in generating cohesion in the officer corps, and how indiscipline amongst junior officers can be tolerated by higher ranks if their behaviour is viewed as consistent organizational goals. Certainly, McChrystal portrayed the incident as evidence of how good leadership and an awareness of the limits of discipline can increase solidarity amongst the officer corps.

In undertaking this micro-sociology of Barossa Night it is clear that the ritualistic use of totems, speeches, song, alcohol, and rhythm all increase social solidarity amongst Royal Irish officers.

Crucially, this generation and maintenance of cohesion through the social ritual contrasts cohesion scholars' recent emphasis on drills and training. Nevertheless, by applying a similar method to a profoundly social environment, it significantly contributes to both the classical and more recent cohesion literature. It shows that even in highly professional combat units, officers still use ancient cohesion-generating ritualistic practises to increase their social cohesion. As one former officer has commented on a draft of this paper:

When written down in the cold light of day the whole ritual seems faintly ridiculous, and certainly foreign to a civilian... [But I] Agree with your conclusions regarding the importance of events like this for cohesion. I always thought it was Mess nights, or drunkenly talking... that really brought us all together as a Mess, more so than exercises or even operations, due to their distributed nature.⁵

Given that other units in other armies celebrate their own unique traditions in similar rituals, this evidence appears applicable to the wider British, and indeed other Western, officer corps.

Perhaps more importantly, that deviant acts can occur during even the most hallowed formal social rituals indicates the degree to which cohesion amongst the professional officer corps is based – at least at times – on a negotiation of order. The negative effect that the awarding of gallantry medals can have on solidarity underscores this point. Despite the traditional view of the officer corps as a united and professional body of military managers, deviancy does occur. Indeed, without it, organisational tensions inherent between the hierarchical rank structure could not be released. The solidarity of the officers would be ultimately threatened. The paradox is that, in accepting some deviancy, the officer corps shows just how cohesive it is. The shared sacred status of combat enables this. That senior officers are willing to accept minor breaches of discipline underscores that social solidarity remains centrally important to understanding cohesion amongst officers. The evidence presented above shows that contrary to previous scholarly analyses, even amongst highly professional officers, social order must be worked at and negotiated; their social cohesion relies on this. Negotiated order theory therefore richly enhances our understanding of military group cohesion, not only of the officer corps, but when combined with Hockey's work, of the modern professional military in general.⁶

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² Available at <http://www.economist.com/whichmba/bit-coloured-ribbon>, retrieved 26 September 2016.

³ Print edition only

⁴ Published biannually, the Operational Honours and Awards List details the issue of gallantry medals to selected service personnel. Citations are written by officers in command, usually without potential recipient's knowledge, and approved by higher commanders before submission to the Ministry of Defence's Honours and Decorations Committee. Scales are set as to the level and number of awards granted per campaign per period. Interestingly, it appears the procedures for awarding of medals has been clarified recently, see *Joint Service Publication 761*.

⁵ Personal communication, 15 August 2015

⁶ For instance, The Royal Anglian Regiment celebrates Minden Day; The Royal Tank Regiment, Cambrai Day.